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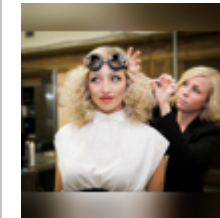
Live Science > Animals

Terrifying Video: Why a Sea Lion Pulled a Little Girl into the Water

By Laura Geggel, Senior Writer | May 22, 2017 05:17pm ET

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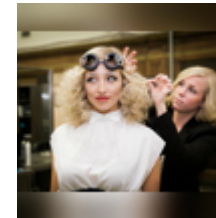
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The moment the sea lion grabbed the girl's dress.

Credit: Michael Fujiwara/YouTube

It was a terrifying moment caught on video. A sea lion bobs its head in the water while a girl stands above. The next instant, the sea lion launches out of the water and pulls the girl in, but only for a few seconds later. A bystander caught the entire episode on a video that's been viewed nearly 1 million times and posted to YouTube Saturday (May 20). But what made the sea lion grab the girl, only

the controversy,



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"My guess is that not only was the girl in shock; probably the sea lion was, too, by having him," said Andrew Trites, director of the Marine Mammal Research Unit at the University of British Columbia. [Images: Sea Lion Pups Make a Splash]



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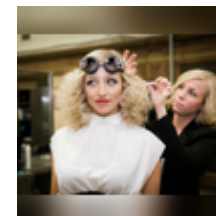
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In the video, people watch and playfully call to the wild sea lion as it approaches a dock in Richmond, British Columbia. Some of the people hold their hands close to the sea lion, treating it as if it were a dog, even though they don't.

Meanwhile, a young girl kneels by the water to get a better look at the sea lion, and yells at it. She is halfway out of the water, likely to see if she has food. Then, the girl sits on the edge of the dock and the sea lion bites her dress and pulls her into the water.

Luckily, an adult jumped in to help the young girl, who was soaking wet but appeared unharmed. The girl was taken to a nearby dock.

Sea lion drags girl into Steveston waters



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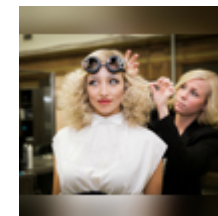


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"I don't think it was a sign of an animal being aggressive or trying to harm the child," Trites said. "She was **expecting food**. They were basically not taunting, but probably unintentionally teasing her for food."

He noted that the first time the sea lion lunged at the girl, she moved away from the water. The sea lion's **predator response** when it apparently mistook her dress for a tasty morsel.

"When something flees, you go faster to grab it," he said. "You see that happening with you [are supposed to] back away slowly from bears."

The sea lion is likely a male California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*), Trites said. Males weigh about 800 lbs. (360 kilograms) and measure an average of 7 feet (2.1 meters) long, **according to** the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Some male *Z. californianus* travel north to Canada during the winter and spring so they can eat down fish and squid. That way, "when they go back to California, they're big and attract females to breeding beaches, and can defend territories almost like sumo wrestlers," Trites said.

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"Those people and the child were just way too close to the animal," he said. "I was so surprised that they put their child into that situation. You wouldn't let your child feed a bear, so why would you let a child feed a lion?"



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Many sea lions are acclimated to being around people, especially fishers who might throw them a fishy meal when dumping leftover fish heads and guts into the water, said a zookeeper at the Bronx Zoo in New York City.



"Sea lions are wild animals," Thomas said. "[Admire them from a distance](#). They are amazing in the water, but you should never be so close that you're putting yourself at some risk because they are going to respond to your presence."



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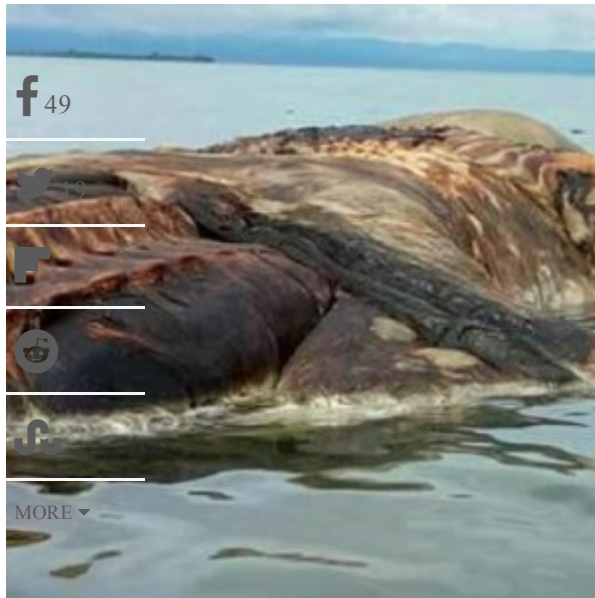
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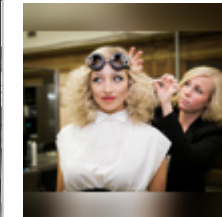
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Author Bio

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As a senior writer for Live Science, Laura Geggel covers general science, including the environment. She has written for The New York Times, Scholastic, Popular Science and Spectrum, a science magazine in Seattle and studied English literature and psychology at Washington University in St. Louis. She has a degree in science writing at NYU. When not writing, you'll find Laura playing Ultimate Frisbee.

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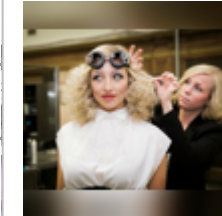
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